

29
07C5

OSWEGO:
An Historical
Address *

GEORGE T. CLARK



Class F129

Book .07C5

OSWEGO:

AN HISTORICAL
ADDRESS



DELIVERED JULY 15, 1896, AT THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
OF THE EVACUATION BY THE BRITISH OF FORT ONTARIO,
OSWEGO, NEW YORK, AND THEIR SURRENDER OF THE
MILITARY POSTS OF THE NORTHERN FRONTIER TO THE
UNITED STATES



BY

GEORGE T. CLARK

OSWEGO: AN HISTORICAL ADDRESS.

The event in the history of the country commemorated here to-day well merits the marked attention it receives. The presence of these distinguished guests, the cessation of our customary employments, this procession of soldiery and citizens, the oration of a famous orator, accord with the significance of the occasion. This old town, endeared to its citizens for its native charms and for the cherished memories and associations of family and friends, happy at welcoming within its walls to-day this great company who is come hither to honor its notable career, has a horizon in history far wider than the compass of yonder lake or yonder shore.

The place and time suggest to every thoughtful mind occurrences and scenes not easily surpassed for substantial importance and striking effect. Here, in a primeval forest, long ago, an old world's civilization met with a new world's savagery, until the one, paling before the presence of the other, dwindled and like a spirit has passed away. Here people of different races, hostile by long tradition, came across the sea and found fresh cause of strife for supremacy. Here passed to and fro the earliest emissaries of the cross, bringing to barbaric tribes the hope of the new faith. Here, as well as elsewhere, were the little beginnings of the great trade and business of the land whose vast life now dominates its

career. And here, too, a hundred years ago a new ship of state slipped her last cable, and, steering an unknown course, swept forth upon the main.

To rightfully perform the office allotted to me, to properly connect this occasion with the great lines of history, to acceptably tell the story of Oswego, is as far beyond the limits of my time as it is beyond the limits of my abilities.

We celebrate to-day the surrender to the United States of the military posts of the northern frontier. We commemorate the final departure from this fortification of English troops, and the end of England's rule over territory of the United States.

This was in 1796. What were the causes? How came it that, thirteen years after articles of peace and twenty years after independence was declared, England held and would not yield this place, still in the virgin forest, and fronting this distant lake? What the location, what its importance, and what its history, that she should care for it?

The new nation was more than a decade old; Yorktown was long since fallen and Cornwallis' sword surrendered, at hearing which Lord North had cried out in despair, "It is all over!" In 1782 Charleston and Savannah were evacuated. Peace was made in 1783, and November 25, 1783, the British troops sailed from New York. The Continental soldiers were long since familiar heroes, and the stories of Lexington, and Saratoga, and Valley Forge, already twice-told tales at many a hearthstone. Long since had Washington written to Lafayette, now gone home and soon to light the fires of liberty on the altars of France: "Envious of

none, I am determined to be pleased with all; and this, my dear friend, being the order of my march, I will move gently down the stream of life until I sleep with my fathers." But ere he slept, obeying the voice of the people as the voice of God, he quitted Mt. Vernon, his quiet harbor on the Potomac, to encounter the storms of the Chief Magistracy. When Oswego was yielded by the British, his matchless career was well-nigh over. Long since had the feeble articles of confederation of the disunited states been exchanged for the constitution of the states united. The long wait for North Carolina and Rhode Island to come in was over. The Northwest territory had been ceded to the general government. Hamilton had "struck the rock of national resources, and abundant streams gushed forth; had touched the dead corpse of public credit, and it had sprung upon its feet." Universal peace had been made with Indian tribes; the infant nation had already put down one insurrection. It stood upon its feet, stalwart, facing the world. And yet, in 1796 the banner of Great Britain still flew within the boundaries of the United States, over the posts of Ogdensburg, Oswego, Niagara, Erie, Sandusky, Mackinaw, and Detroit.

The cause of this anomaly is not found in the history of a broken treaty alone. Such a rehearsal might indicate the proximate cause for England's retention of this fort, but the root of the matter lies in deeper and richer soil.

In the last resort, the important part for which Oswego was cast in the history of the country, and I may say in the history of two continents, during the eighteenth century, fell to it because of its native, its

original gifts. These are no less dominant in the career of principalities and towns than in the career of the individual. Like the mental and moral equipment of a man, the physical and geographical equipment of a nation or a town are a predominating factor in its fate, infiltrating all the stream of life, ameliorating misfortune, rendering success more successful, and getting the most from opportunity.

The career of Oswego is accounted for chiefly by its location. So it has been, and so it will continue to be. Even now the same native force of her location which had free scope in the eighteenth century is heard to move as if to bring forth in the twentieth.

But in the eighteenth century the land was a wilderness; the mysterious, the well-nigh impenetrable forest was everywhere, tree upon tree, thicket upon thicket, rock upon rock. Who can describe it?—its gloom, its grandeur, its depths, its awfulness. There the sun seldom struck its beams. There were the haunts of wild beasts, the bear, the wolf, the wildcat. There, the only highways, rough, tortuous, uncertain foot trails. To traverse them was an art; to lose them, suffering and even death.

In such conditions the site which Oswego occupied had its extraordinary advantages. From it the water went everywhere—the broad lake, the full running river. These were her talismen. The streams, the lakes, the rivers—these were the open, the unhindered pathways of that distant time. The canoe of the red man, the batteau of the voyager, the shallop of the European, from camp to camp, from post to post, voyaged over them, penetrating the fastnesses of forest and swamp where foot could scarcely find a way, skirting

the shores of the great inland seas away toward the setting sun. No situation on the continent surpassed Oswego in that day for facilities in this communication. Far from the fringe of Atlantic settlements, deep in the endless woods, all roads led to her.

Toward the west stretched the blue Ontario, as fresh, as fair, as fickle as to-day, drawing her waters from the waters of half a continent, from Erie, Huron, Michigan, Superior, from their myriad attendant lakes and streams, netting those limitless lands in silver meshes. Off there were the Wyandotts, the Ottawas, the Nippissings. Well knew they Oswego, the English market for peltries and skins.

From the south ran the strong, the rapid Oswego, our familiar, beautiful stream, pouring with unceasing flow the waters of those many limpid lakes that in the basin of New York catch from surrounding slopes and hills the countless rills and brooks. There was the land of the Iroquois, the Six Nations, "the Romans of the new world," most knowing, most ambitious, most courted, most feared of the whites. The Indian, the trader, the missionary, the pioneer, the soldier, with few carries, passed with ample water south and westward for two hundred miles. South and eastward, the Mohawk, close at hand, hurried down its lovely valley their frail barks to Albany, the Hudson, and the sea. That way, first the enterprising Dutch and then the masterful English, in 1664, were in possession.

To the north and east, across the lake, opened the St. Lawrence, that majestic river of the world, bearing on its bosom a thousand islands, tumbling its waters along the rapids, sweeping them by the ancient settlements of

Montreal and Quebec, and pouring them far away into the broad arm of the Atlantic. There were the French. The pen falters that approaches the theme of the French in Canada. What a story! So many heroic lives; so many saints and martyrs of the Church! Such soldiers, such pioneers, leaving the courts and halls of Paris and Versailles to perish from famine, the winter, and the flood, living with savages and dying without friends! The India of the East could furnish no more to the imagination of Burke himself than could this India of the West.

Such was the situation of Oswego; such the territory that ministered to its importance.

The name is Indian—Oshwakee, Oswago, meaning “The flowing out of the waters.” With the French it was Chouaguen.

It was inevitable that the “pioneers of New France” who followed Cartier along the great pathway of the St. Lawrence, pushing westward, should almost in the beginning come to this locality. As early as 1615, Samuel de Champlain, who of all that brilliant company of French crusaders left the most enduring mark, passed directly through or very near to it. Tiring of the inactivity of Quebec as he had tired of Paris before, he was engaging his dauntless spirit in a second expedition against the Iroquois. This was five years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, and but six years after Hendrick Hudson discovered the river that bears his name.

With the peace that followed Champlain’s unsuccessful war upon the Indians, came followers of the cross—brethren of the order of Ignatius Loyola. In 1653 Father Joseph Poncet, and in 1655 Father Pierre Chau-

mont passed through Oswego from Montreal on missions to the Onondagas, chief nation of the six. The wilderness of the new world provoked no fears in their hearts equal to their fears for the unconverted. In the spring of 1655, Father Claude Dablon, with three other Jesuit fathers and a company of fifty Frenchmen under Sieur Dupuis, lingered at Oswego on their way to make a settlement with the same people. In two years the settlement failed, and all returned the same way to Montreal.

From 1690 to 1696, Count de Frontenac, the vigorous Governor of Canada, founder of Kingston, making Oswego his base of operations, dispatched expeditions against the Iroquois to drive them from alliance with the English and into alliance with himself. In July of the latter year, old man that he was, he appeared at Oswego with a veritable army of Canadians and Indians, having cannon, mortars, and grenades, and journeying up the rapid river against the Onondagas, found their villages deserted. Some chroniclers relate that on this expedition Frontenac erected at Oswego a stockade. If so, this was the earliest fortification here.

And now to the west and north the Dutch and English traders in fur from Albany and the east pressed their way among the Indians. Oswego lay on a straight road toward home. Soon the red men anticipated at Oswego the coming of the white, and there, in 1722, William Burnet, Provincial Governor of New York, hardly less distinguished as the son of the celebrated prelate, author of "Burnet's History of His Own Times," built a trading-house. The following year fifty-seven canoes went from Oswego to Albany with seven hundred and thirty-eight packs of beaver and deer skins.

The French post at Niagara and the later one at Toronto in vain essayed to intercept this trade. The Abbé Piquet, a Jesuit priest and chronicler, writes in his diary: "Oswego not only spoils our trade, but puts the English into communication with a vast number of our Indians, far and near. It is true that they like our brandy better than English rum; but they prefer English goods to ours, and can buy for two beaver-skins at Oswego a better silver bracelet than we sell at Niagara for ten." Oswego owed this advantage of five beaver-skins to one largely to her place on the map.

In the spring of 1727, Governor Burnet erected on the west side of the river, toward its mouth, on what is now the intersection of VanBuren and First streets, a masonry redoubt, loopholed for musketry, to protect his trading-post. It was sixty feet by thirty, and forty feet high. This was Fort Oswego, or "Oswego Old Fort," as it was afterwards described. The French called it Fort Chouaguen, and later Fort Pepperell. In 1741, the Provincial Assembly voted six hundred pounds to build a wall about it "with a bastion in each corner to flank the curtains." John Bartram, a Pennsylvania traveler, thus describes it in 1743: "On the point formed by the entrance of the river stands the fort or trading castle; it is a strong, stone house, encompassed with a stone wall near twenty feet high, and one hundred and twenty paces round, built of large, square stones, very curious for their softness. I cut my name in it with my knife. The town consisted of seventy log houses, of which one-half are in a row near the river, the other half opposite to them."

The Marquis de Beauharnois, Governor-General of Canada, immediately demanded its evacuation, declaring it to be a manifest breach of the treaty of Utrecht. The diplomatic Burnet got the question referred to London and Versailles, and nothing came of it.

Hitherto the conflicts between the French and English in America were faint echoes of their continental strife. But in the final struggle now impending the rival colonies were chief figures. The treaty of Aix la Chapelle in 1748 was a weak compact in essential particulars. It lasted not so long as either the peace of Ryswick in 1697 or the peace of Utrecht in 1713.

Says a modern writer: "It is customary in the United States to regard Wolfe's victory at Quebec as the solstice in the ecliptic of modern history, since it secured America for English institutions, and American civilization is to dominate the world." Says Parkman: "It supplied to the United States the indispensable condition of their greatness, if not of their national existence."

This view of the French and Indian war discloses Oswego upon a height of historical prominence not generally appreciated. Its figure in this great struggle towered among the highest.

In a letter to the Provincial Assembly in 1740, Governor Clark, of New York, writes that Oswego was the only English military post on the northwestern frontier, and if captured, nothing prevented the French from holding all the lands from Canada to Georgia. "The peace and happiness of the plantations and the trade of England, if not the very being of His Majesty's dominion on this continent, depend on the holding of

Oswego," he says. Governor Clinton wrote to his Assembly in 1744 that it was "the key for the commerce between the colonies and the inland nations of Indians." The possession of Oswego by the English was a thorn in the side of the French. Says Parkman: "No English establishment on the continent was of such ill omen to the French." To them it was the hated Chouaguen.

Governor Shirley, of Massachusetts, first commander-in-chief of the British forces in America, and a man of great energy, regarded Oswego as more important than any post, and to it he first gave his attention. By his orders Colonel Mercer constructed, in October, 1755, Fort Ontario, very nearly, if not precisely, on the site of the fort where we now are. It was a substantial fortification, one hundred and eighty feet on each side, built of pickets eighteen inches in diameter, rising nine feet from the ground, and surrounded by a ditch eighteen feet wide by eight feet deep. It appears to have been a "starred fort." A third and inferior fortification, known as "Oswego New Fort," or "Fort George," he also erected on the high ground of the west bank, on what is now the southwest corner of Van Buren and Seventh streets, and where is now the residence of Hon. Edwin Allen. It was one hundred and seventy feet on each side, with ramparts of earth and stone twenty feet thick and twelve feet high, encompassed with a ditch fourteen feet broad and ten feet deep.

The French and Indian war was formally declared in May, 1756. On July 3d of that year the command of Colonel Bradstreet, returning to Albany from Oswego, where he had been with stores and reinforcements for the garrison, was waylaid above Minetto by French and

Indians under De Villiers. Bradstreet withdrew his men, about two hundred and fifty in number, to Battle Island, repulsed the enemy after a sanguinary fight, and crossing to the mainland, finally put them to flight.

In August of the same year, the Marquis de Montcalm, commander of the French troops in America, and hero of many continental engagements, was before Oswego with a force variously stated at from three thousand to five thousand men. There is in the possession of the library of the city the original map of Oswego, made by an engineer of this expedition, Chevalier Chaussegros de Léry, and used by the French in their attack. It discloses, in addition to the fortifications already mentioned, a fourth, in the nature of a lunette or small outwork, situated apparently near the intersection of the present West First and Schuyler streets.

But few details of the conquest of Oswego by the French can be given here. The English force of about eighteen hundred men was divided between Fort Ontario, in command of Colonel Littlehales; Fort Oswego, in command of Colonel Mercer, and Fort George, in command of Colonel Schuyler. The French approached from their landing-place, about three miles east, and invested Fort Ontario. After delivering a somewhat brisk fire from the fort, the English withdrew across the river to Fort Oswego. The French, occupying Fort Ontario, turned their batteries upon Fort Oswego and Fort George upon the hill. Twenty-five hundred Canadians and Indians crossed the river and attacked from the land side. On August 14, 1756, the remaining fortifications capitulated, after Colonel Mercer had been killed. Fifteen hundred men were

captured, Shirley's and Pepperell's regiments, veterans of Fotenoy, and, in addition, seven vessels of war, one hundred and thirty-nine guns, and large stores of ammunition and provisions. Among the English captives was Francis Lewis, afterwards a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The forts were demolished. The zealous Abbé Piquet erected over the ruins of this fort a cross, on which appeared the words "*In hoc signo vincunt.*" Near by he raised a staff bearing the arms of France, and wrote beneath the words "*Manibus date lilia plenis.*" The captured flags were carried in triumph through the streets of Montreal and Quebec, and hung like votive offerings in their cathedrals.

The loss of Oswego was regarded in England as a national misfortune. Pitt, the Great Commoner, taunted the ministry with it from the opposition benches. The fall of Henry Fox and the accession of Pitt to power were doubtless partially precipitated by it. Horace Walpole, the most famous letter writer in English literature, writes to Horace Mann from Arlington street, under date of November 4, 1756, as follows: "Minorca is gone; Oswego is gone; the nation is in a ferment; Oswego, of ten times more importance than Minorca, is annihilated." Let it be recalled that Minorca was the strongest place in Europe after Gibraltar. November 15 he writes: "The massacre at Oswego happily proves a romance; part of the two regiments that were made prisoners are actually arrived at Plymouth, Quebec being too scanty to admit additional numbers."

In 1758, Louis XV. struck a medal to commemorate the victories of France. On the obverse appears his bust, entitled "*Imperator Orbis,*" the Ruler of the World; on

the reverse appear the following names: "*Wesel, Oswego, Port Mahon, St. David.*" Port Mahon, on Minorca, was the most important fortress in the Mediterranean, captured by the French in 1756; St. David, the strongest fort in India, taken by Count Lally in 1757; Wesel, the fortified town of the French on the lower Rhine, successfully held against siege, and Oswego, the most valued position in North America, captured by Montcalm in 1756. These were the tokens of the title of the world-conquering Louis. One of these medals is the property of Mr. Theodore Irwin, of this city.

With Pitt as Prime Minister, English affairs in North America took a turn.

The forts being demolished, Oswego was suffered by the French to slip back to the English. In August, 1758, General Bradstreet, with Major-General Schuyler and three thousand men, crossed from Oswego in batteaux, whaleboats, and a small schooner, and took Fort Frontenac, now Kingston, from the French—a disheartening loss. July 1, 1759, General Prideaux, with two thousand regulars, and Sir William Johnson, with one thousand Indians from his seat on the Mohawk, proceeding from Oswego, captured Fort Niagara after a long siege. While they were gone the Chevalier de la Corne attempted in vain to retake Oswego, then guarded by six hundred provincials under General Haldimand.

September 18, 1759, Quebec fell, and Wolfe and Montcalm gained immortality. In that year Fort Ontario was rebuilt, and became the base of operations against Montreal, the seat of the French Empire in Canada. August 10, 1760, Lord Amherst, with ten thousand men and thirteen hundred Indians, embarked

from Oswego against Montreal. The spectacle of this great army of red-coats and Indians, at that time one of the largest ever assembled on the continent, can better be imagined than described. With the surrender of Montreal on the 8th of September, the Seven Years' War in America, regarded as a great crisis in its history, was at an end. The peace of Paris, nearly three years later, left little to France east of the Mississippi but a share in the fisheries of Newfoundland and the St. Lawrence.

After the peace the post of Oswego was garrisoned by the Fifty-fifth Infantry, a Scotch regiment from Sterling, under command of Major Alexander Duncan. The daughter of one of his captains was Annie McVicar, who became Mrs. Grant, the authoress of the "Memoirs of an American Lady," published in London in 1808, justly celebrated sketches of manners and scenery in America as they existed prior to the Revolution. She tells us that in 1760 in the hollow south of this fort there was a fine garden, which "throve beyond belief or example," and also a bowling green and fish pond.

This, also, was about the time and this the place in which Cooper laid the scene of his renowned romance of *Mabel, Jasper, and the Pathfinder*.

In the summer of 1766, Pontiac, the great Ottawa chieftain, who had captured all but three of the Western posts, and for years defied his enemies, at length submitting, journeyed to a great council fire at Oswego from his seat in the West, to meet the English and the Iroquois, with Sir William Johnson at their head. The pipe of peace passed around, and Pontiac and his dusky followers voyaged homeward on the lake, each with a

medal bearing this inscription: "A pledge of peace and friendship with Great Britain, confirmed in 1766."

Thereafter trade, the ward of peace, was left to increase and multiply at Oswego.

The center of the storm known as the French and Indian War passed over this locality; the center of the greater conflict of the Revolution, now at hand, lay to the south and east. The limits imposed by time and the occasion allow of no excursion into the history of that war. Oswego's part in it was, by comparison, inconsiderable. She stood like a sentinel on the outskirts of the battle. The war's alarms sounded faintly on her ears. Seldom was she drafted into active service.

The British made haste to range the savages of the land on their side. The baronial family of the Johnsons on the Mohawk, sons of the famous Sir William, were the chief emissaries for this purpose. Twice did they, with Joseph Brant and the execrated Butler, organize grand councils of the red men at Oswego to win them over. On July 27, 1777, Colonel Barry St. Leger, with Canadians and Indians, whose purpose was to co-operate with the army of Burgoyne from the north for an invasion of the Valley of the Mohawk, set forth from Oswego. Up the river moved this army of two thousand white men and Indians. They besieged Fort Schuyler, on the Great Carry, between Wood's Creek and the Mohawk, where the waters flow one way to the lakes and the other to the sea, and on August 6th fought with the provincials one of the bloodiest battles of the war—Oriskany. There the valiant Herkimer, wounded and dying, withstood the foe. At length the relief of Arnold, raising the siege of the fort, turned the overwhelming tide and rescued Central

New York. The defeated English hastened to Oswego, and there scattered, some to Montreal, some to Niagara. Fort Ontario was left unoccupied. In July, 1778, Americans under Lieutenant McClelland destroyed it to prevent, as far as possible, its reoccupation. In the eyes of the Indian allies of the English, the vision of Oswego, the time-honored Chouaguen, laid low, was ominous. They besought the English to restore it, but in vain, and, as report goes, it was not until some time between 1780 and 1782 that Fort Ontario was partly raised from its ruins and supplied with a garrison of British soldiers.

Almost the last, if not the last, military movement of the Revolution was directed against Fort Ontario. Conscious of its importance to the British in their relations with the Indians, Washington at Newburgh directed Colonel Willett with a small force to surprise and capture Fort Ontario. This was as late as January, 1783, the news of the signing of the treaty not yet being received. Willett reached the fort, but his expedition was unsuccessful, owing to the severity of the cold and snow, and his failure to surprise the garrison.

Thus it has been attempted to outline the important part played by Oswego in the great drama of the continent. It fell to her because of her location; by reason of that it was as inevitable as are any human events. Thereafter, until the war of 1812, she was a passive quantity in the controversies and parleys that arose over the terms of peace of 1783, to finally subside in the evacuation by the British in 1796 which we are here to celebrate.

And now to the proximate causes of this day. The scene is shifted to Paris and Versailles. There were

the captivating, the wise Franklin, the sturdy Adams, and the astute Jay, waging the diplomatic battles of their country against the reluctant commissioners of Great Britain. The negotiations which resulted in the definite treaty of peace, September 3, 1783, are declared by high authority to have been "one of the most brilliant triumphs of the whole history of modern diplomacy." Certain it is that the opposition to the terms of it in Parliament turned Lord Shelburne out of office. In the item of transcendent importance—namely, territory—the success of the American commissioners was beyond all expectation. "The boundaries must have caused astonishment in America," wrote De Vergennes, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Luzerne, the representative of France in America. And so they did. Against the secret efforts of France herself to prevent, the American triumvirate pushed the boundaries of the new nation over the Alleghanies as far as the Mississippi, secured the priceless right to navigate that river, to fish on the Newfoundland banks, and to an opening to the Pacific. Chief credit for this exploit is commonly given to Jay, and yet Franklin's tact and Adams' boldness were indispensable.

There were, however, other provisions of this famous convention with which we to-day have especially to do. They were the adjustment of troubles deeply vexing the two countries, touching keenly the sensibilities of their peoples. The treaty provided that private debts on each side should be paid, and that Congress should recommend the state legislatures to restore estates confiscated from British citizens and their American sympathizers. The debts referred to were for the most part obligations

incurred to English merchants by American merchants for goods sold prior to the commencement of the war.

The seventh article of the treaty was as follows: "His Britannic Majesty shall with all convenient speed, and without causing any destruction and without carrying away any negroes or other property of the American inhabitants, withdraw all his armies, garrisons and fleets from the said United States, and from any port, harbor or place within the same." The requirements of this article were not fulfilled. British troops sailed from New York taking negroes with them, and when Baron Steuben, on behalf of the Americans, proceeded to assert formal possession of the military posts on the northern frontier, it was denied him. No orders had been received, said General Haldimand, to evacuate, but only to cease hostilities. For thirteen years soldiers of the foreign power mounted guard, flew their country's ensign, and fired the evening gun over Fort Ontario and the frontier posts. This spectacle was a constant irritation. Nor was its effect merely sentimental. British officers levied duties on American boats passing Oswego. Traders and boatmen were in a ferment. They vented their wrath by seizing batteaux of goods in charge of the Johnsons, the ancient allies of the British, at Three Rivers, on the Oswego.

England's retention of the northern posts cost American fur-traders dear. A list of furs advertised at London for the spring sales of 1787, as stated in the American Museum, contained over three hundred and sixty thousand skins, which were valued at two hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds. These figures convey some notion of the trade largely diverted from American traders at Oswego, Albany and New York.

But it is not to be understood that Great Britain willfully continued her possession of the posts. In November, 1792, Jefferson, then Secretary of State, formally opened the subject of the violation of the seventh article of the treaty by the retention of the posts, with Hammond, the English envoy to this country. The explanation came quickly that the King, his master, had suspended that article because of the failure of Congress to prevent the hindrance of British creditors in collecting their debts, and because estates confiscated from the Tories had not been restored. The charge was true. Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and South Carolina had every one enacted statutes blocking the machinery of the law against English creditors. To the other charge of failure to restore the confiscated Tory estates, Jefferson replied that the only engagement had been to recommend a restoration of the estates, not to restore them. The claim was made at the time that English handlers of the profitable fur trade influenced the British ministry to delay a settlement whilst they were enjoying what was naturally the business of Americans. It was also charged that the well known feebleness of the infant nation to enforce reprisals contented England with the situation in which things were. Still another cause assigned was the purpose of the British to compel the alliance of the Indians through the threat implied in the possession of the frontier posts.

These and other poignant hostilities established a high tension between the countries. On April 21, 1794, the Republicans in Congress moved to suspend all commercial intercourse with Great Britain until the frontier posts were given up. The people, loaded with

debt, and otherwise never so poorly prepared for war, still clamored for its declaration. But now he who so often before had stilled the tempest, disclosed his calm and majestic personality for the salvation of his country. Oblivious of the storm of popular disapproval, Washington wrote to the Senate: "But as peace ought to be preserved with unremitting zeal before the last recourse, which has so often been the scourge of nations, and cannot fail to check the advancing prosperity of the United States, is contemplated, I have thought proper to nominate and I do hereby nominate John Jay as envoy extraordinary of the United States to His Britannic Majesty."

The faithful servant who a decade before had obtained peace with so much honor for his country, was again enlisted to preserve it. Well did he know the unpopularity of his mission. He writes: "If Washington sees fit to call me to this service I will go and perform it, foreseeing as I do the consequence to my personal popularity. The good of my country I believe demands the sacrifice, and I am ready to make it."

He sailed on the 12th of May, 1794. While he was upon the sea, affairs at home were rapidly approaching war. Three companies of a British regiment invaded what is now Northern Ohio to establish Fort Miami there, and in a message to Congress Washington suggests the propriety of preparing for the dread event. But the celebrated treaty known by the name of its negotiator, signed in London on the 19th of November, 1794, averted a catastrophe. By its terms the United States undertook to compensate British creditors. British troops were to withdraw from all territories of the United

States on June 1, 1796. Compensation for retention of the posts was omitted on the ground that the United States had suffered several states to prevent the recovery of debts owed to British creditors.

The storm of popular disapproval which greeted this treaty was not less than Jay had anticipated. In Philadelphia he was hung in effigy, and in New York Hamilton was stoned when he arose to speak in his defense. "Calumny," said the unruffled Jay, "is seldom durable; it will in time yield to truth." On June 24, 1795, the treaty was ratified by the Senate, and on August 15th Washington signed it.

The delay in the withdrawal of the British forces from Fort Ontario after June 1st until the day, one hundred years ago, whose anniversary we celebrate, was not the fault of Great Britain. Washington in his last message to Congress assigned the reason for it. He writes that the period at which the appropriation was passed to carry into effect the treaty "necessarily procrastinated the reception of the posts stipulated to be delivered, beyond the date assigned for that event." The diplomatic correspondence on the subject in the foreign office in London between the Duke of Portland, Great Britain's Secretary of State, and Lord Dorchester, Governor-General of Canada, discloses the readiness on their part to comply with the terms of the treaty. They arranged to retain a guard for the security of the posts until the United States should be ready to occupy them.

And so it transpired that in July, 1796, a hundred years ago, Fort Ontario, a cherished fortification, passed from the possession of a great power across the sea, and entered into the birthright of its own people. There

is slight record of the circumstances of the transfer. Like many significant events in history, it transpired in quietness and simplicity. No great display of arms, no strains of martial music, no concourse of people, no presence of distinguished men and women, then honored that great day as now it is honored.

One eye witness of the event says that the British garrison marched out and gave possession to the American troops, who marched in with their field-pieces, planted the standard of the United States on the ramparts of the fort, and fired a salute of fifteen cannon. He further declares that the British officers behaved with great politeness.

Another witness, Mr. F. Elmer, an American officer, writing to Mr. George Scriba, says that the American flag under a federal salute was for the first time displayed from the citadel of the fort at the hour of ten in the morning. Captain Clark and Colonel Fothergill were His Majesty's officers, left with a detachment of thirty men for the protection of the works. "From these gentlemen," he says, "the greatest politeness and civility was displayed to us in adjusting the transfer, the buildings and gardens being left in the neatest order."

These are the simple annals of the evacuation of Fort Ontario by the British. Thus ended England's sovereignty over territory of the United States.

Time forbids and the occasion does not require the later history of this time-honored fort. It must suffice to say that for some time prior to the war of 1812 Fort Ontario was unoccupied. During that war, on May 5, 1814, a British fleet of eight vessels from Kingston, carrying two hundred and twenty guns and three thou-

sand men, under Sir James Yeo, appeared before Oswego and bombarded it. It was defended by Colonel Mitchell, who had been dispatched from Sackett's Harbor with three hundred men. Under protection of the ships' guns, the British troops were landed, and on May 6, after a vigorous resistance, the command in Fort Ontario surrendered. The British threw down the fortifications and abandoned the place. Thus it lay until in 1839 Congress voted a sum for its restoration. The timber work and the houses you see about you are of that date. Since then it has been continuously garrisoned until two years ago, when the authorities at Washington saw fit to abandon this historic and strategic fort.

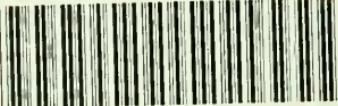
And now we would depart the scene and this occasion with sentiments of welcome and friendship for our kinsmen of Great Britain across the lake and across the sea.

We celebrate here to-day no victories. The occasion does not invite nor does our disposition so incline us. We celebrate rather the final coming into his estate of the rightful heir. The just Washington, in his last message to Congress, December 7, 1796, writes that as soon as the Governor-General of Canada could be addressed with propriety on the subject, arrangements were cordially and promptly concluded by Great Britain for the evacuation of the posts. Eye witnesses of the event we celebrate declare that it was conducted by the British with the greatest politeness and civility. This cordiality, this courtesy, may we be permitted on this occasion to acknowledge and to reciprocate. If courtesy be the flower of peace, then with the flowers of peace we, too, would decorate this day as they did decorate

the day a hundred years ago. Peace has been in our time. In our time may it not be marred.

It has been said that the destiny of the race is in the custody of the English-speaking people. Together, then, let them bear onward toward “the universal pacification of mankind.”

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 224 297 7

